



Natural Heritage &
Endangered Species
Program

Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Division of Fisheries & Wildlife
North Drive, Route 135
Westborough, MA 01581
Phone: (508) 389-6360 Fax: (508) 389-7891
www.nhesp.org

Least Bittern

Ixobrychus exilis

State Status: **Endangered**

Federal Status: None

DESCRIPTION

The Least Bittern is 11-14 inches long with a wingspan of 16-18 inches, making it the smallest member of the Heron Family. It has a black and green head and back with buff and chestnut wing patches, distinguishing it from the larger, dark-winged green heron. The Least Bittern has a slightly crested head and a yellow bill. It also has a rare dark phase which is a rich chestnut color. It is a weak flier and usually walks or climbs through wetland vegetation.

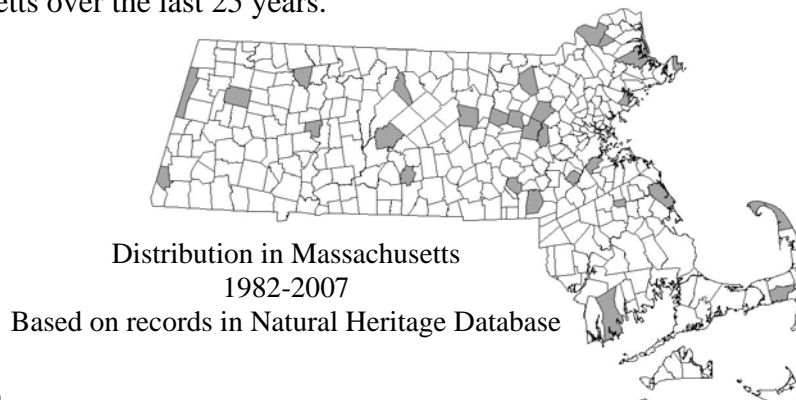


RANGE

Southern Canada and northern United States to southern Texas and the West Indies. Winters from the Gulf Coast south.

STATE OCCURRENCES

The Least Bittern has only been reported or suspected breeding at 32 sites scattered across Massachusetts over the last 25 years.



HABITAT

Freshwater marshes where cat tails and reeds predominate.

POPULATION STATUS

Considered rare and vulnerable in Massachusetts; believed declining in parts of its range.

LIMITING FACTORS

Primary cause of rarity in Massachusetts is the availability of suitable wetland habitats.